Below is an excerpt from a transcription of a Dharma Talk given by
Thich Nhat Hanh, explaining the difference between a Dharma Talk
and a lecture.

"Listening to a Dharma talk is also a form of practice. We used to
be in school, listening to lectures and so on, and during that time
we got in the habit of using only our intellect, because what we
needed in school was our intellect. But in a practice center a Dharma
talk is not just a lecture. A Dharma talk is an opportunity to open
ourselves up and to allow the deepest levels of our consciousness to
be exposed to the Dharma. Instead of using the intellect, we put the
intellect to rest, because our intellect has the tendency to compare,
to judge, to evaluate, to arrange things and ideas and classify them
into boxes.

The Dharma is not a lecture. The Dharma in the Buddhist tradition is
a kind of rain. Our consciousness should behave like the soil, the
earth. We have to allow the Dharma talk to penetrate. According to

the Buddha we have seeds of understanding, of awakening, of compassion, within ourselves. We don't need these seeds to be transmitted from the teacher. We already have all of them in the depth of our consciousness. We call it store consciousness, sometimes earth consciousness. Because these seeds are buried deep in the mind, in the soil of our consciousness, it is very hard for them to grow and manifest. Above there are many layers of suffering, confusion, prejudices and so on, and our intellect can never go deep enough. Our intellect very often contradicts our deepest nature and therefore to allow the intellect to rest and to open our earth store in order for the rain of the Dharma to penetrate is very important.

[Thay recites a poem in Vietnamese and then translates]

The spring rain is falling gently
and the earth and the soil of my consciousness
is penetrated by the rain.
And the seed deep within me
now has a chance to be penetrated by the rain and to smile, sprouting.

We have to listen to the Dharma with that kind of

spirit, to allow the soil of our consciousness to be penetrated by the Dharma rain, not using ideas, concepts, that we already have to compare and to classify. That is very important. If we are already used to that kind of listening, using only the intellect to judge, to compare, to classify, we have to learn a new way, because listening to a Dharma talk is not the same thing as learning the philosophy of Buddhism. They are two things, quite different. A lady who left us yesterday said that during one hour and a half, Thay said very much the same thing. He could have done it in fifteen minutes. She was very hungry for ideas, but she did not realize that a Dharma talk is a time for practice. The teacher is supposed to offer the Dharma rain in such a way that the good seeds in the people can be penetrated and can sprout and become flowers, the flower of understanding, the flower of compassion and so on.

Using our intellect is like using a nylon sheet to order to receive the rain, or nylon buckets to receive the rain. When

you use a nylon
sheet, you prevent the rain from penetrating into the soil. That is
why there is a way to listen to Dharma talks. That way is not to use
your intellect. You let your whole person be penetrated by the Dharma,
and your person includes the body. We know that our consciousness has
so many layers and the deepest layers are very difficult to reach and
therefore we have to bring our selves to a state of oneness. The body
is there and the mind is there, the consciousness is there, and we
just allow the rain of the Dharma to fall.

In the time of the Buddha it is reported in many sutras, many people
would get enlightened during the Dharma talk and their eyes would get
very bright and they were released from the bondage they had carried
with them for a long time. When the Buddha saw that person, he always
said, "That person got liberated. That person has understood. That
person has been transformed." So transformation and healing can be
possible also during a Dharma talk."